



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

African Elephant Conservation Fund

African elephants face a variety of challenges to survival. In many areas they are being illegally hunted to the point of local extinction for ivory and bushmeat, after already having disappeared from large portions of their historic range. In other places, due to their increased numbers in confined protected areas, they impact their environment and conflict with local human populations.

The more pressure put on the environment and consequently on elephant populations, the greater the need for effective protection and sound management. Managers need to know elephant numbers, migration routes, and why they travel vast distances, as well as the threats they face. In the short term, sustaining threatened elephant populations is of utmost importance. Over

the longer term, effective land-use planning and nature reserve management, conservation education, and sound international policy are crucial. Of equal importance are the needs of rural people, some of whom live alongside elephants and are often asked to endure the effects that elephants can have on agricultural and water resources. Until human-elephant conflict is minimized, the elephant's survival will remain at high risk. Meeting the complex and growing challenge of elephant conservation demands a multi-faceted approach based on sound science and accommodation of the needs of both humans and wildlife populations.

Despite their earnest intentions, most African countries lack the financial



African elephants
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resources to adequately conserve and manage elephants. Building the capacity to provide trained and equipped personnel to resolve elephant conservation issues is a huge challenge.

Alarmed at the rapid decline of African elephants since the mid-1970's largely due to illegal trade for their ivory, and recognizing the role of the United States in sharing responsibility for providing conservation of the African elephant, the U.S. Congress enacted the African Elephant Conservation Act (Act) in 1988 to assist in the conservation effort. The African Elephant Conservation Fund (Fund) was established through the Act as the mechanism providing financial assistance and is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). Starting in 1990, Congress has appropriated \$12 million to the Fund resulting in the awarding of 170 grants for projects in 25 range countries leveraging \$57 million in matching and in-kind support for the protection, conservation and management of African elephants.

The following projects provide a sample of recent contributions through the Fund for the continued survival of African elephants:

The Fund currently supports the Botswana Department of Wildlife and National Parks to conduct an extensive review of its 1991 Elephant Management Plan. Botswana's success in protecting elephants has resulted in a significant population growth in the north of the country. However, elephants appear to be damaging vegetation along watering points, and increases in human-elephant conflict are noted. To address these issues, a series of professional workshops are bringing together experts and various local stakeholders to determine how the ten-year old elephant management plan should be adapted to respond to changes in elephant populations and their habitats.

In 2002, a project supported by the Fund in collaboration with the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), provided equipment and training to reinforce the KWS Airwing's capacity to deploy light aircraft for elephant surveys and conservation.

Small, efficient aircraft allow KWS biologists and counter-poaching experts to conduct surveillance over the large expanses of savannas through which elephants migrate seasonally. With the ability to rapidly reach and monitor remote areas such as Tsavo, Meru, and Marsabit national parks, as well as outside the parks, KWS can study elephant numbers and movements and coordinate ground patrols to prevent poaching, thus providing increased protection.

War and civil unrest have wreaked havoc on elephants and other wildlife in much of the Congo Basin. This enormous expanse of forest, second only to the Amazon forest, is thought to be the last great stronghold of the Forest Elephant. Recently, geneticists supported by the Fund, determined that the Forest Elephant is a separate species from the larger and more numerous Savanna Elephant. This has tremendous implications for conservation, particularly in light of the tentative security situation over much of the Congo Basin and parts of West Africa. To help address this problem, the Fund is supporting a program called MIKE (Monitoring Of The Illegal Killing Of Elephants) mandated by the Convention on the Trade of Endangered Species (CITES). The Wildlife Conservation Society, working with the CITES MIKE program and the governments of six Central African nations, is coordinating MIKE Central Africa and providing much-needed training to African conservationists. The program is producing valuable statistical information on elephant numbers and distribution as well as on the threats to them by poachers who seek ivory and meat for illegal markets.

One of the brightest spots for elephant conservation in Central Africa is the nation of Gabon, where President Omar Bongo has initiated a bold effort to conserve forests and wildlife by creating 13 new national parks. As part of the contribution to this exciting program, the Fund is supporting elephant conservation efforts in two of the parks. Working with the Gabonese government, the World Wildlife Fund's Central African Program Office is receiving the Fund's assistance to reduce poaching and bushmeat traffic

in and around Minkebe NP. Another new park, the Ivindo NP in eastern Gabon, receives assistance from the Fund through efforts of the Wildlife Conservation Society and representatives from the Ministry of the Environment. These and other national parks in Gabon offer an unprecedented opportunity to plan, develop, and manage large natural areas and surrounding multi-use forests.

Significant improvement in the conservation status of African elephants is now evident in some places where the Fund has worked with on-the-ground partners, but many areas still suffer from the conditions evident to the U.S. Congress when it created the Fund. The Service invites submission of grant proposals for the conservation of African elephants throughout their range and supports projects to develop local ability to conserve, manage, and conserve these animals by providing training, equipment, and technical exchange.

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Spring 2003